10 Assumptions about Change

1. Do not assume that your version of what the change should be is the one that should be implemented.

2. Assume that any significant innovation, if it is to result in change, requires individual implementers to workout their own meaning.

3. Assume that conflict and disagreement are not only inevitable, but fundamental to successful change.

4. Assume that people need pressure to change (even in directions that they desire). But, it will only be effective under conditions that allow them to react, to form their own position, to interact with other implementers, to obtain technical assistance, etc.

5. Assume that effective change takes time; 3-5 years for specific innovations, greater than 5 years for institutional reform.

6. We should not assume that the reason for lack of implementation is outright rejection of the values embodied in the change, or hard core resistance to a change. There are a number of possible reasons: value rejection, inadequate resources to support implementation, insufficient time elapsed.

7. We should not expect all or even most people or groups to change. Progress occurs when we take steps that increase the number of people. Our reach should not exceed our grasps...but by such a margin that we fall flat on our face.

8. Assume that you will need a plan that is based on the above assumptions.

9. Assume that no amount of knowledge will ever make it totally clear what action should be taken.

10. We should assume that changing the culture of institutions is the real agenda, not implementing single innovations.

5 Insights into the Change Process

1. The necessity of combining pressure and support in the change process.

2. The critical importance of reducing some of the early costs and increasing some of the early rewards for implementers.

3. The need to think big, but start small, in order to achieve some manageability.

4. The tendency for behavior to change before beliefs, and all that implies, for in-service.

5. The realization that achieving clarity, skill, commitment, is a progressive process.

Michael Fullan, updated 2005